



Senate Hearing: *Strengthening Entrepreneurship Amongst Minority Women*
U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Wednesday, May 8, 2013

Good morning Madam Chair Landrieu, Ranking Member Risch, and other distinguished members of the US Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship. My name is Sophia Parker, and I am the owner of DSFederal, Inc. I would like to thank you for permitting me to speak today. I would also like to thank USPAACC for nominating me to speak and to share my story as a minority woman entrepreneur.

I came to this country from Taipei, Taiwan 33 years ago. Growing up as a girl in Taiwan, I did not know what it meant to have big dreams. I was a top student in my class yet came from a poor family and believed that the highest position I would ever have would be that of a receptionist or a secretary. One day a distant relative returned from America and told me that the streets in America were paved with gold. I was told that as long as you study and work hard, you could do anything. My life was forever changed. I wanted that dream to be more than just a dream. I wanted it to be my life and I was willing to do whatever I had to in order to make it come true.

My transformation into an entrepreneur did not happen overnight. After graduating from college in the United States, the next 20 years my life were dedicated to raising my two children and working for the US State Department in places such as Pakistan, China and Russia. I returned to the United States in 1996 and spent a number of years working in Industry. I remember holding a meeting one day after I had led an effort which resulted in millions of dollars for the company where I worked, only to have senior executives ask me to leave and make them coffee. Their request made me feel

that all of my hard work did not matter. That day I realized that I still had not found my dream and I was determined to do more.

At 50 years old, I left a comfortable and secure job in Industry to start my own company. I mortgaged my home and put my life savings into starting my company, DSFederal. I wanted to connect bright minds with the best technology and I believed I could do it with a better customer focus than my larger, more established competitors. My 22-year-old son joined me to help make my dream come true.

In the beginning it was just the two of us at our dining room table, our laptops open and many cups of Taiwanese green tea to help fuel our progress. It was difficult at first, and there were times when we nearly lost everything. I had some very trying experiences and could tell you plenty of stories of how we were not treated fairly by larger companies. We could have given up, but that is not the American way. We were going to find a way to rise above those challenges. And we did. We discovered the Small Business Administration which helped us properly develop our infrastructure and enabled us to gain 8(a) status for our company in 2008. The process to become an 8(a) was incredibly arduous but fair and honest. My children always call me a tiger mom – a mother who is extremely demanding with very high standards – and I would argue that the SBA could give any tiger mom a run for her money!

In all seriousness, the SBA's strict standards and procedures helped our company immensely. DSFederal would not be where it is today without the guidance provided by the SBA and the 8(a) program. The 8(a) program gives minority business owners a chance to incubate for eight years so that they can one day graduate and mentor other minority businesses. Under Ms. Bridget Bean's leadership, the SBA's District Office, although working with a small budget and huge workload, assisted us and mentored us with good business practices. DSFederal in return has strived to fulfill our role by providing opportunities for minorities and women. We are proud that 59% of our staff

are women and 60% are minorities. We look for ways to mentor our employees to help them follow their dreams as I believe only the 8(a) graduate firms truly understand all the possible challenges of small businesses and can serve as the best mentors for those that aspire for business success.

Rhea Somaiya, a young minority woman, is an example of why it is so important to give women opportunities to excel and do meaningful work. Rhea is a high school junior in the Washington, DC Metro Area who was part of a winning team that received the TiE DC Award for its TYE DC Business Idea, 'Mirror Me.' TYE is a program for high school students which allows them to learn about the challenges and rewards of being an entrepreneur. They are matched with entrepreneurs who coach them with the help of a business-focused curriculum. In an interview with WashingtonExec, Rhea said, "This program and winning the team best business case has changed my view on what I want to do in college and how I want to proceed with my career. I want to be a Washington Entrepreneur and at the same time be involved in public service." It is young women like Rhea who are great examples of why it is so important to empower youth to become future entrepreneurs and leaders.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics has indicated that in five years' time, more than half of the jobs created by small business will have been created by woman-owned companies. We have been fortunate to grow DSFederal into a viable small business over the past five years, now with 65 wonderful employees. Since we are small and nimble, our customers get competitive pricing without sacrificing service quality. But what makes me most proud is that since winning our first contract in 2009, we have never stopped hiring, and are proud American taxpayers.

Part of my American dream is to give back to those less fortunate. Last winter, my son and I raised money with the help of our entire company to travel all the way to Kabul, Afghanistan. We celebrated Christmas and New Years by helping set up a library and computer lab at an orphanage. We also spent time with many street children who are bright and eager despite the challenges they face on the street in the severe winter conditions. I stood in the meal room at the refugee camp,

watching the children enjoying a hot meal we provided and shared my story with them. I told them that I, too, had spent my childhood at an orphanage in Taiwan. I, too, sat in a large meal room with toys and books locked up. It was America that provided me the opportunities to build a life for my family and me. I told them, if I could go to America to go to school, and work hard to fulfill my dreams and care for my family, they could too. One cheerful girl raised her hand and asked, "Can I go to America one day like you?" I replied, "Of course, as long as you study hard and work hard, you will have a chance. America is the land of opportunity for anybody who is willing to work hard."

The success of minority women entrepreneurs like me represents true American success. America's streets are indeed paved with gold; hearts of gold; for those that mine them through hard work and diligent effort. Minority women entrepreneurs not only create more jobs for the disadvantaged, we are the Tiger Moms; extremely demanding with very high standards, providing a positive role model for others in society with a passion to fulfill their American dream. The Senate's support to foster minority women entrepreneurs through funded programs gives hope to women in our nation and around the world who still struggle and fight for economic and social equality. Please continue your support by providing equal footing for minority women so that they can lead the way and change the world for the better.

Thank you.